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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

JUDGING SHEEP

IMPROVEMENT of the sheep industry depends to a great extent upon a more general understanding of what constitutes a good or inferior animal and a broader appreciation of the methods of judging individuals by a study of their external parts.

The success or failure of a breeder likewise depends largely upon his ability to place the proper weight on the various points which must be considered in selecting foundation stock. This ability can be gained only through a careful, systematic study, coupled with a great deal of practice in judging and handling sheep.

Contribution from the Bureau of Animal Industry

JOHN R. MOHLER, Chief

Washington, D. C. July, 1921

SEP 21 1921

JUDGING SHEEP.

G. H. BEDELL, *Animal Husbandry Division.*

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SOME ESSENTIALS IN SHEEP JUDGING.

Any one who engages in the keeping of sheep should have a fairly good knowledge of what to look for when selecting individuals for his flock. Upon his ability to place the proper weight on the various points which must be considered in the individual selected depends to a great extent his success as a constructive breeder.

It is probably true that the average person knows less about the method to follow and the points to look for in sheep than in most other types of livestock. With other stock the judge can depend almost entirely upon his eye in arriving at his decision; with sheep, however, he must not only use his eyes, but to verify his opinion he must handle the individual. The fleece on the sheep is very apt to cover defects which can be determined only by actual handling.

A good judge of livestock has a natural aptitude for the work, coupled with a great deal of practice. The best judges are those who are constantly at it, whether in the show ring, feed lot, or field. It is natural for them to be always comparing points and qualities of individuals and weighing their value.

THE SCORE CARD.

The beginner will find the score card a helpful guide in his judging work. The score card gives a detailed description of the parts of a perfect animal. It gives these parts in a systematic way and its use will help in learning a uniform system of judging and in developing an appreciation of the relative value of the various parts of the animal in relation to the whole. As soon as one has learned the art of properly observing the various parts of the animal and considering their respective importance the score card becomes unnecessary and comparative judging practicable.

NOTE.—Mr. Bedell resigned from the department in October, 1920.

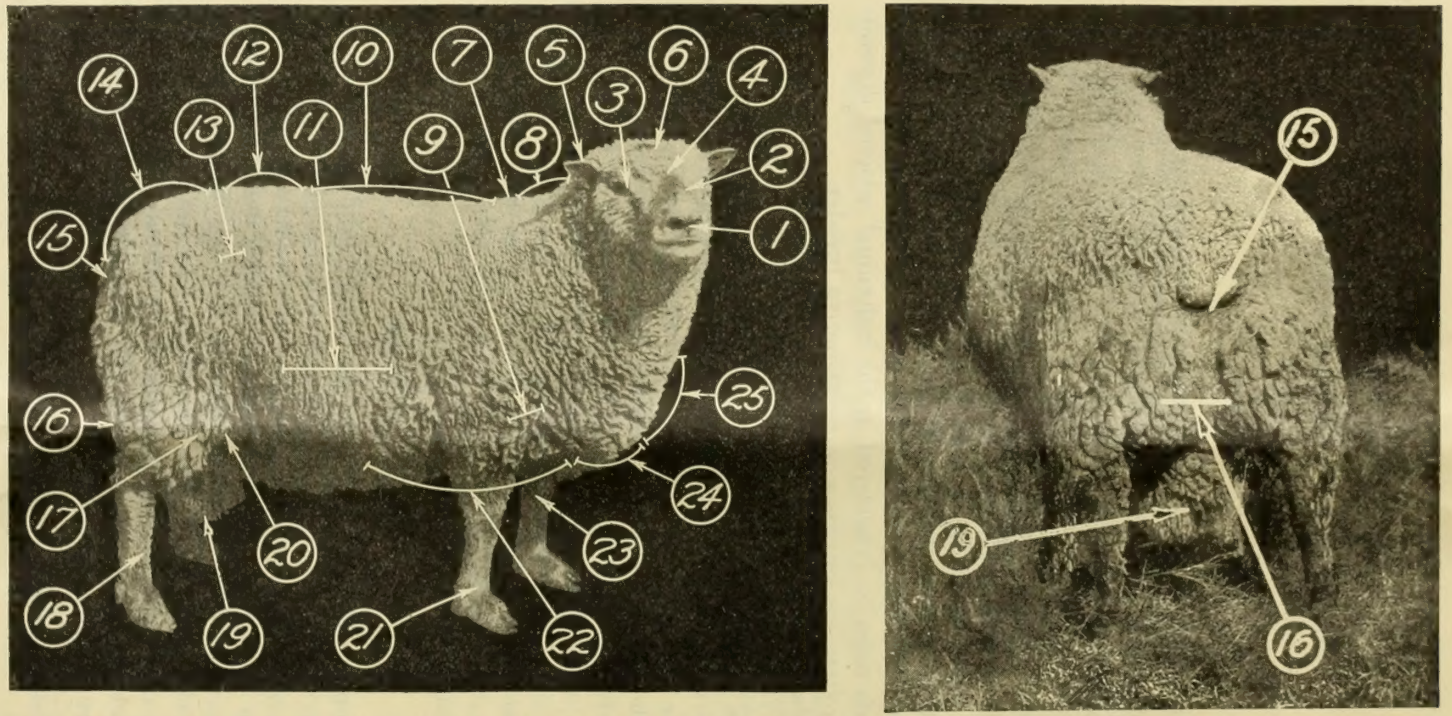

FIG. 1.—The external parts of a sheep. 1. Muzzle broad, lips thin, nostrils large. 2. Face short, features clean-cut. 3. Eyes large and clear. 4. Forehead broad. 5. Ears alert and not coarse. 6. Poll wide. 7. Top of shoulder compact. 8. Neck short, thick, blending smoothly with shoulder. 9. Shoulder thickly covered with flesh. 10. Back broad, straight, thickly and evenly covered. 11. Ribs long, well sprung, and thickly covered. 12. Loins broad, thick, and well covered. 13. Hips wide and smooth. 14. Rump long, level, and wide to dock. 15. Dock thick. 16. Twist deep and firm. 17. Thighs full, deep, and wide. 18. Legs straight, short, and bone smooth. 19. Cod or purse in wether, scrotum in ram, udder in ewe. 20. Flank full and deep. 21. Forelegs straight, short, and strong. 22. Chest deep, wide, and full. 23. Forelegs wide apart and forearm strong. 24. Brisket full and rounding in outline. 25. Breast well extended.

HOW TO USE THE SCORE CARD.

From the score card learn to know the value to be given each part in terms of points. Use your judgment in making the score for each part. It takes a good animal to score 75 points out of the 100, and a choice one to score 90 points. By use of the score card study the animal to learn where the various parts of the animal are located and what the words used in describing a part of the animal mean. Study the full-grown animal, then study animals of different ages of the same breed, noting wherein they differ from the mature animal. Familiarity with the description of the different types and breeds of sheep is also helpful.

Score Card for Judging Mutton Sheep.

Scale of points.	Possible score.	Points given animal judged.	
		Student's score.	Instructor's score.
GENERAL APPEARANCE.—25 points:			
1. Weight; pounds	5		
2. Form; straight top and underline, deep, broad, low set for breed, compact, well proportioned	10		
3. Quality; hair fine, bone fine but strong, features fine but not delicate, skin pink	10		
CONDITION.—12 points:			
4. Flesh covering; deep, even, firm. Points indicating finish are fullness in shoulder and brisket, thick covering over top of shoulders, back, ribs, loin, thick dock	12		
HEAD AND NECK.—9 points:			
5. Head; clean-cut, strong mouth, thin lips, large nostrils, large, clear eyes, alert look, face short, forehead broad, ears alert not coarse, considerable width between ears	5		
6. Neck; short, thick, smoothly joined with shoulder	4		
FORE QUARTERS.—10 points.			
7. Shoulders; compact on top, smoothly joined with neck and body and well covered with flesh	8		
8. Brisket; full, round, and well extended	1		
9. Legs; straight, short, wide apart	1		
BODY.—18 points:			
10. Chest; deep, wide, full	2		
11. Ribs; well sprung, long, close and thickly covered	4		
12. Back; broad, straight, thickly and evenly covered with flesh	6		
13. Loin; wide, thick, well covered	6		
HIND QUARTERS.—17 points:			
14. Hips; wide apart, level, smooth	1		
15. Rump; long, level, wide and thick at dock	4		
16. Thighs; full, deep, wide	4		
17. Twist; deep, firm, plump, joined well down on leg	5		
18. Legs; straight, short, strong, wide apart	1		
19. Udder or scrotum: Ewe's udder, well formed, large, and soft. In rams, both testicles large and well developed	2		
WOOL.—9 points:			
20. Quantity; long, dense, even in density and length	3		
21. Quality; crimp distinct and even, oil uniformly distributed throughout fleece	3		
22. Condition; strong in fiber, clean, soft, and bright	3		
Total	100		

COMPARATIVE JUDGING.

After you have become familiar with the score card and its use, and have had practice in comparing the points of many animals with the ideal described in the score card, you are ready to do comparative judging.

With comparative judging, instead of balancing the parts of the animal against the ideal, you compare the parts of several animals of the same kind. In doing so it is important to keep in mind the standard which they should approach.

Follow the same systematic order in making your comparison, part by part, of the individuals before you. For example, compare the heads of the animals in question and decide which one is superior in this particular. In comparative judging, a letter is given each animal, as A, B, and C. The beginner will find it best to write down

FIG. 2.—Front view of a good mutton-type ram. This ram has a masculine head, is wide through the shoulders and floor of the chest. His legs are well placed, the bone is strong and smooth.

the parts in which each animal excels, together with the way in which it excels.

After all the animals have been examined carefully and the comparison made for each, the best-balanced animal, that is, the one most uniformly perfect in the largest number of important parts and without disqualifying weakness, should be placed first in the class; the next best, second; and so on. Keep clearly fixed in mind your reasons for placing any animal ahead of any other, and be able to give them verbally or in writing. In giving these comparisons do

not try to describe each animal but tell wherein each is superior or inferior to the others. For example, where there are three breeding ewes in a ring, designated A, B, and C, and B is placed first, A second and C third, the procedure would be as follows:

B was placed first because she has a stronger back, deeper body, larger leg of mutton, and a fleece that is of higher quality than A or C. A was placed second because she has a stronger constitution, as shown by her greater depth and width of chest, greater width of loin, and brighter skin than C. C was deficient in having a weak back, light hind quarters and a dull skin that shows she is out of condition.

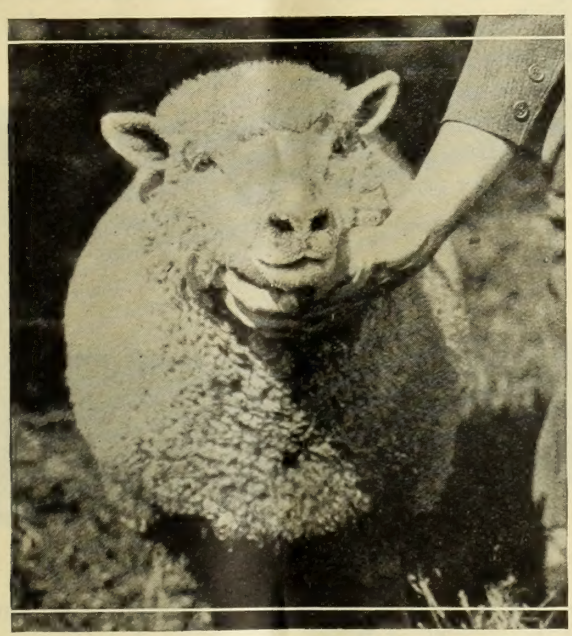

FIG. 3.—Front view of good mutton-type ewe. A ewe should show a more refined head than a ram. In other points she should have similar characteristics.

The beginner in judging sheep is apt to rush in and begin the actual handling too soon. It has been remarked that experienced judges at fairs and large shows begin handling at once. This is true largely because they have become able through practice to size up individuals very quickly with the eye, and thus begin handling immediately to verify their decisions.

HOW TO HANDLE THE SHEEP.

After the sheep has been carefully inspected from a distance and the general make-up noted, verify your observations by going over the sheep with the hand. In doing this keep the fingers close together so as not to leave depressions in the fleece, for when the in-

dividual has been fitted for showing, sprawling fingers may easily mar the evenness and smoothness of the fleece.

Keep in mind the impressions you have gained of the animal when you come to the handling. If you do this you are not likely to make a mistake in your decision. Practice in judging is necessary to gain the correct touch. Pounding or clawing the animal is entirely out of order.

STEPS IN SYSTEMATIC JUDGING.

The first step is to stand at a distance and get the general lines and make-up of the individual. The first estimate should be carefully and firmly impressed upon the mind. Strive for a mental picture of the individual, and fix the picture in the mind.

FIG. 4.—Viewing sheep from front.

It will be best to follow some uniform system in judging a sheep, or a class of sheep. The following is suggested:

While viewing the sheep in front, note the make-up of the head; observe whether it is well proportioned. A ram should have a strong, bold head, showing masculinity; in the ewe a feminine appearance is desired. Note the width and depth of the brisket, and the length, shape, and general position of the front legs. (Fig. 4).

From the side observe the size of the animal and the general style, and notice whether the top line and the underline are parallel. The body should be of good length and depth in the most desirable individuals. Take special notice of the way the individual carries its head, whether the animal has the appearance of being sluggish or full of vigor. It is important to get in mind the length of the neck, its setting, and the relation of head and neck, body (or middle) and rump to the total length. A desirable animal is well proportioned in these respects. (Fig. 5.)

Now view the sheep from behind. Place special emphasis on the width of the rump, its straightness and evenness. The thighs should be full and the twist deep. The hind legs should be well placed, strong, and of good size for the individual. (Fig. 6.)

FIG. 5.—Viewing sheep from side.

Close inspection of the head: Observe the shape of the head. If the animal is a male, the head should be strong; if female, more refined. Note the width of the face and forehead, the brightness of the eyes, and placement of the ears. (Fig. 7.) Before leaving the head look at the teeth of the sheep to determine age (see page 18).

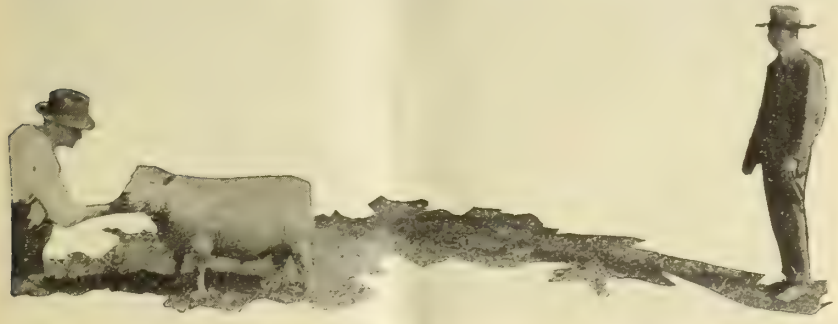

FIG. 6.—Viewing sheep from rear.

When judging rams of hornless breeds, place the fingers in the horn holes to determine whether there is any growth. Rams of hornless breeds should be free of scurs or growth of horns. With the left hand determine whether there is any enlarged growth in the throat known as goiter. (Fig. 8.)

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Thickness of the neck: The neck should be short and thick, smoothly attached at the head and top of shoulders. A ram's neck should be shorter and thicker than a ewe's. (Fig. 9.)

Fullness of the neck vein: The neck vein should be full and join smoothly with the shoulders. Fullness in the neck vein indicates high condition and a well-muscled neck. Touch the lower points of the shoulder to note whether the bones are unduly prominent or well covered with flesh. (Fig. 10.)

Compactness on top of shoulders and depth of chest: Place the right hand on the top of the shoulders to determine how compactly the shoulder blades are set up against the spine, also the covering

FIG. 7.—Inspecting the head.

of flesh over the top of the shoulders. Place the left hand on the floor of the brisket and chest to determine the width. Note the depth of chest by keeping the right hand on the top of the shoulder. (Fig. 11.)

Condition of flesh and spring of rib: By placing the hand just back of the shoulder blades, thumb and fingers forming a V, note the condition of covering and at the same time test the spring of ribs from the spine. A full spring of rib is desirable. (Fig. 12.)

Width of chest: It is important that a sheep be full in the chest. The flesh covering should be even and thick down over the ribs. There should be fullness back of the shoulder, indicated by the position of the hand. The ribs should be covered well with flesh

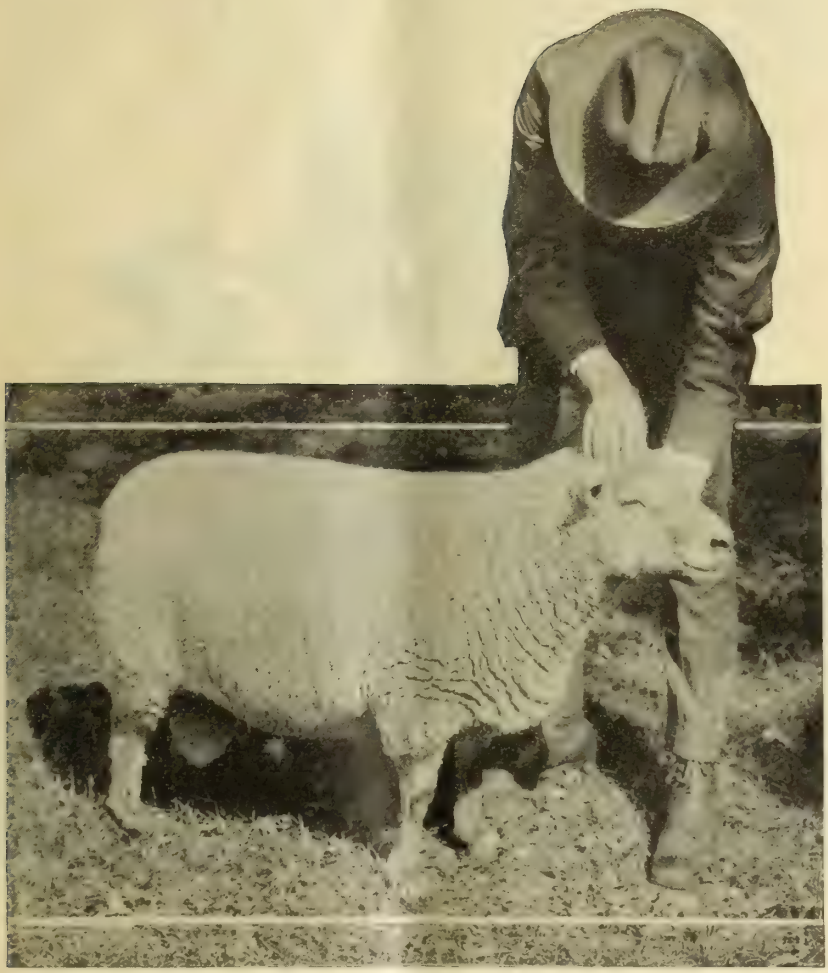


FIG. 8.—Inspecting head of hornless ram.

and the spaces between the ribs should be well filled with firm flesh. (Fig. 13.)

Strength and covering of the back: By placing the hand firmly on the back with fingers together, note the strength and covering over the back. Note carefully the spring of the ribs, especially the last rib, as the width of a well-shaped barrel or body increases gradually from the shoulders back to the last rib. In breeding ewes a large, well-sprung middle is desirable. (Fig. 14.)

FIG. 9.—Inspecting neck.

Width and thickness of loin: Determine the width of the loin by placing one hand straight down on each side of it, and the thickness of the loin is determined by placing the fingers flat over the spine and noting whether the bones are well covered with flesh. (Fig. 15.)

Width and fullness of rump: The rump should be level and carry its fullness out to the tail head The hips should be wide apart and smooth, and the rump should be full in the position where the hands are shown. Grasp the dock and note its size and fullness.

A wide, thick dock indicates deep, strong muscling along the spine. A good filling of fat on each side between the dock and rump indicates high condition, more important in fat sheep than breeding sheep. (Fig. 16.)

Depth and fullness of twist: Determine the depth and firmness of the twist by placing the left hand on the top of the rump, the right hand under the twist and pressing up slightly. A full twist is desirable as it helps make a plump leg of lamb or mutton. (Fig. 17.)

Development of the leg: Determine the size of the leg of lamb or mutton by placing the left hand in front of the leg, close to the

FIG. 10.—Fullness required in neck vein.

body and the right hand in the rear, as shown. The leg should be of good size, full, and the fullness carried well down to the hock. (Fig. 18.)

The fleece and skin: After the conformation of the sheep has been determined, the fleece and skin must be carefully examined. The best wool grows on the shoulder or just back of it. Part the fleece in this region by laying the hands flat on the surface and gently forcing it to part, as shown in figure 19. When the wool is

FIG. 11.—Judging shoulders and chest.

FIG. 12.—Noting condition of flesh and spring of rib.

FIG. 13.—Determining flesh on ribs and girth over heart.

FIG. 14.—Judging strength and covering of back.

open note its density, quality, color, and condition. The skin in healthy animals is pink. Dark skin, bluish in color and harsh in feeling, may indicate poor health.

Determine the density of the fleece by grasping a portion between the thumb and finger. If the wool feels compact and fills the hand well it is likely to be dense.

FIG. 15.—Inspecting loin.

Quality of wool is indicated by the waves or crimp in the fiber. When they are short and carry regularly from the skin to the outer tips of the fiber, the wool is fine and even in quality.

Condition of the fleece is determined by the color, yolk, and foreign material in the wool. Wool in good condition is bright, fairly clean and free from chaff and burrs, with the oil or yolk evenly distributed.

The fleece on thigh: After the examination of the fleece, on the fore part of the body, make a similar examination at the midside and

FIG. 16.—Inspecting rump.

FIG. 17.—Noting depth of twist.

on the thigh. (Fig. 20.) In mutton breeds the quality and character of the wool in the thigh should be as near like that on the shoulder as possible, and free from coarse fibers or kemp. In fine-wool breeds, examine the fleece also at the dock, on the belly, and other parts.

When handling rams it is advisable to notice the scrotum. Both testicles should be normally developed. With ewes, examine the udder; if it is hard, or otherwise defective, some deduction should be made.

FIG. 18.—Determining leg development.

In judging fat sheep, note particularly whether the individual is "overdone." An excessive quantity of soft, loose fat over the ribs and sides indicates this condition and counts against the individual.

DETERMINING AGE OF SHEEP BY THE TEETH.

It is important to be able to tell the approximate age of sheep by the teeth. Though it is not always possible to determine the exact age in this way, a fairly close estimate can be made. A little practice will soon enable one to tell the age fairly well.

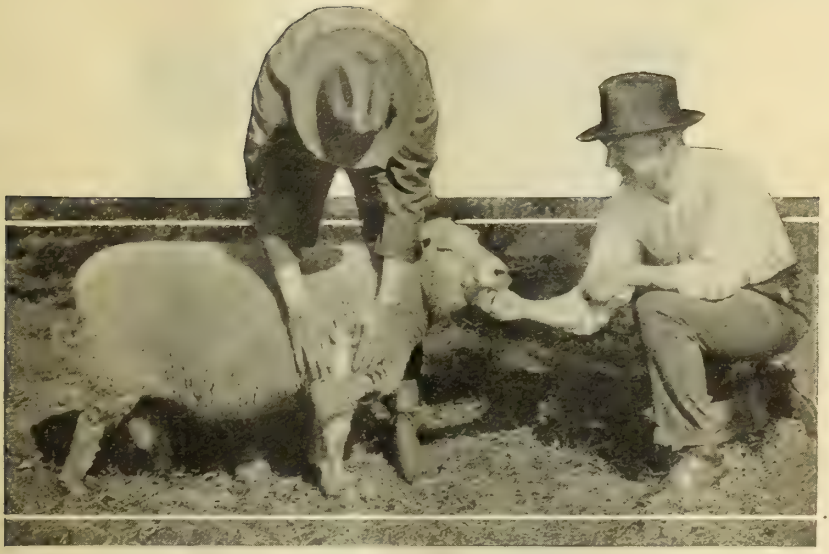


FIG. 19.—Examining fleece and skin.

FIG. 20.—Examining fleece on thigh.

One good way to hold the head of the sheep and expose the teeth is shown in figure 21. The first and second fingers are placed on the lips, a slight pressure exerted, and the teeth exposed.

FIG. 21.—Lamb's mouth.

A lamb mouth.—In a lamb all the baby teeth are present soon after birth. These teeth are small and are known also as the milk or lamb teeth. (Fig. 21.)

FIG. 22.—Yearling mouth.

Yearling mouth.—When the sheep is from about 12 to 14 months old the two permanent front teeth, as shown in figure 22, come in. The milk teeth are seen at the side.

Two-year mouth.—At about 22 to 24 months, another pair of permanent teeth comes in, one on each side of the front pair. (Fig. 23.)

FIG. 23.—Mouth of 2-year-old sheep.

FIG. 24.—Mouth of 3-year-old sheep.

Three-year mouth.—The third pair of permanent teeth comes in at about 34 to 36 months, one on each side of the first two pairs. (Fig. 24.)

Full or 4-year mouth.—At about 46 to 48 months of age a sheep has a full mouth with all its permanent teeth present. From then on only an estimate of the age can be made from the mouth. As a

FIG. 25.—Four-year-old or full mouth.

sheep grows older the teeth gradually spread and become shorter with wear. (Fig. 25.)

FIG. 26.—Broken mouth, aged sheep.

Broken mouth.—As sheep grow still older they gradually lose their teeth. A broken-mouth sheep has trouble in eating and should not be kept in the flock. (Fig. 26.)

LOCATION OF MARKET CUTS IN CARCASS.

In judging fat sheep the judge should have in mind the various market cuts and their relative importance. It should always be remembered that the market wants a well-finished carcass. The most valuable cuts come from the leg, loin, and ribs, the cheaper cuts from the shoulder, breast, and shank. (Fig. 27.)

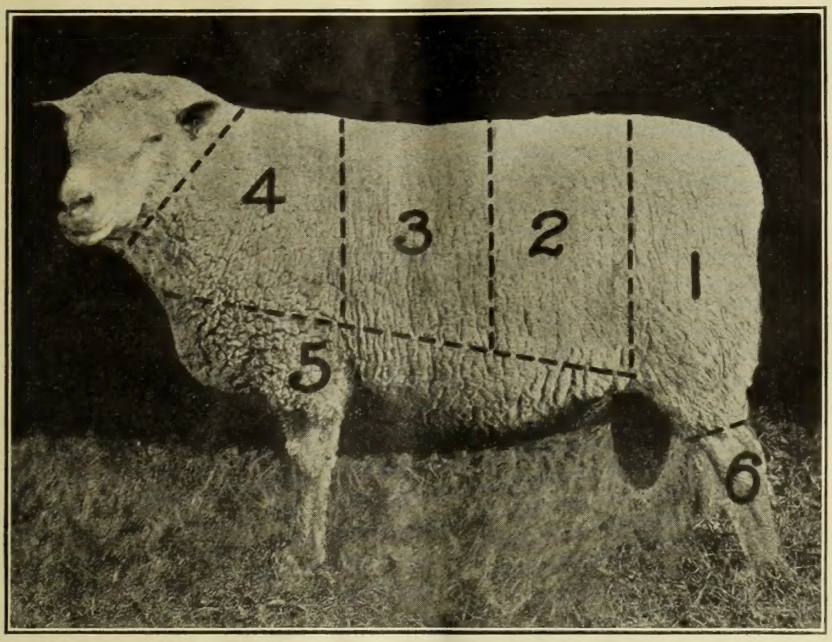
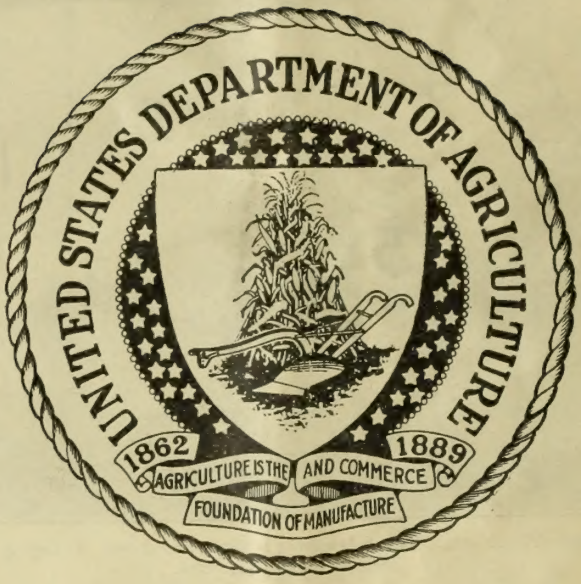


FIG. 27.—Mutton and lamb cuts. Each half carcass is divided as shown. 1. Leg; 2, loin; 3, ribs; 4, shoulder; 5, breast; 6, shank.

The weight of a mutton carcass varies with the age, breed, and degree of fatness. The trade likes mature wethers to weigh around 140 pounds. Lambs weighing about 80 to 85 pounds, in prime quality and condition, usually sell at the highest market price.



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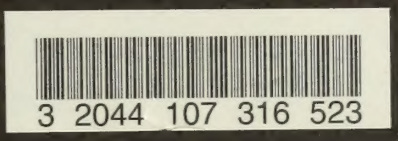
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